

EIGHTBALL



No.18

IN THIS ISSUE



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COVER



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
DANIEL CLOWES

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SERIES



EIGHTBALL



the VOICE OF FANDOM

YOU SUCK CLOWNS! EACH 15-
SUE GETS DIRTIER AND DIRTIER. WHY
DO YOU PRINT YOUR COMIC ON NEWS-
PRINT NOW? SINCE WHEN DID YOU
START CALLING IT THE TALLAHASSEE
DEMOCRAT AND FOLDING IT OVER LIKE
A PAPER? SINCE WHEN DID YOU DE-
CIDE TO REPORT THE NEWS? WHO
MADE YOU A REPORTER ANYWAY?
THE ONLY COOL THING IS THAT YOU'RE
NOW PUTTING IT OUT DAILY. I THINK
THAT'S A FIRST...

CHANCE
TALLAHASSEE, FL.

I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR
EIGHTBALL SINCE I MOVED TO
DISHANTING L.A. AND HAVE JUST
BOUGHT #17. I MIGHT SAY, YOU
HAVE TO GET OVER YOUR OBSESSION
WITH VULVAS AND VAGINAS.

NATALIE LARIO
LOS ANGELES, CA.

I THINK 'GHOST WORLD' IS QUITE
ACCURATE. I DON'T KNOW WHY IT
SEEMS SO REALISTIC, BUT IT FEELS
LIKE A GENUINE PORTRAYAL OF FEM-
ALE FRIENDSHIP. I TAKE THIS TO
MEAN ONE OF TWO THINGS: EITHER
THERE IS LESS OF A DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN OR

ELSE YOU ARE A WOMAN WRITING
UNDER A PSEUDONYM.

LOUISA MICHAELS
BERKELEY, CA.

...WHILE I'M NOT CERTAIN THAT
EIGHTBALL WOULD BE READ BY JUDGE
READERS, I'D LOVE TO BE ABLE TO DO
SOMETHING WITH YOU IN THE HAND,
OR RECOMMEND YOUR WORK IN OUR
ART COLUMN. DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING
THAT FEATURES WOMEN WITH BIG
HOODERS?

DENY FLEURY
NY, NY.

I WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE
WORD BUBBLE IN FRAME #8, PAGE 10 OF
EIGHTBALL #2. THE WORDS OF THE
MAN AT THE COUNTER ARE: 'FUCK
YOU, FRAGGT!' IN GENERAL, YOUR
WORD CHOICES ARE QUITE DEARABLE,
BUT HERE THE PUNCTUATION AT THE END
OF THE SENTENCE COMPLETELY RUINS
THE FRAME BY OVERRIDING IT AN
INCH TOO MUCH. I DON'T MEAN TO
BE A HIT-PICKER, BUT WITHIN THIS
DISCREPANCY LIES A CLUE THAT POINTS
TO ONE PATH WHICH MAY HELP TO
PROPEL YOU TO THE NEXT PLATFORM
OF GREATNESS.

J. FRANKLIN
NY, NY.

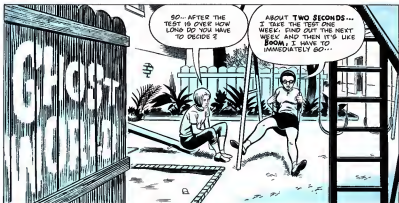
EIGHTBALL #2140 SHATTUCK AVE #2107 • BERKELEY, CA. 94704
SEND #2 TAG FOR COMPLETELY UNINTERESTING RECORDED LISTING OF ORIGINAL ART FOR SALE.

SPECIAL BONUS!

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING PAGE 14,
CERTAIN LUCKY EIGHTBALL CON-
SUMERS WILL FIND A FREE IN-
SPIRATIONAL PAMPHLET. THIS
BOLD NEW TREAT EXPLORES WITH
CONFOUNDING FRANKNESS THE THIR-
TEEN MINUTES OF A LIFE GIVEN TO
RAGE, BORDERLINE AND WILD GUILDS
LESS FORTUNATE READERS MAY OBTAIN
THEIR OWN COPY BY SENDING
ONE DOLLAR TO:
MODERN CARTOONIST INC. (CARTAGRAM) 35
7563 LAKE CITY WAY SEATTLE, WA 98145



EIGHTBALL # 30 - EIGHTBALL # 30 1997
CARTAGRAM INC. 3575 LAKE CITY WAY SEATTLE, WA 98145
THIS ART AND STORY © DANIEL B. CLAWSON
NO PART OF THIS COMIC MAY BE REPRODUCED
WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM ME. MY COMICS
NOT SIMILARITY BETWEEN ANY OF THE NAMES,
CHARACTERS, SETTINGS OR INSTITUTIONS IN
EIGHTBALL AND THOSE OF ANY PERSONS OR
ORGANIZATION IS INTENDED. LETTERS TO EIGHTBALL
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LIKE I SAID, THESE THINGS ARE GETTIN' HARDER TO FIND; NOW THEY USE VANS, I THINK... BUT YOU COULD DO A LOT WORSE THAN THIS ONE, ESPECIALLY FOR A NEW DRIVER. SHE'S GOT UNBELIEVABLY LOW MILEAGE, AND IF YOU GET INTO AN ACCIDENT I **PROMISE** YOU'LL BE THE ONE WALKING AWAY!



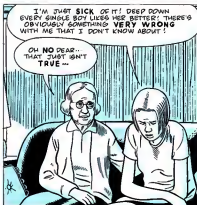
YOU REALLY SHOULD THINK ABOUT THIS. PUMPKIN... IT'S LIABLE TO COST A LOT MORE THAN YOU THINK; YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO SPEND A **FORTUNE** ON GAS...



YOU'VE TRICKED ME INTO MOVING TWO THOUSAND MILES AWAY AND RUINING MY LIFE... CAN'T YOU LET ME HAVE THIS ONE MORSEL OF FUN?









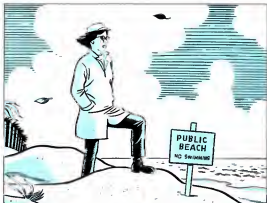


















MODERN CARTOONIST



MODERN CARTOONIST



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THE CURRENT SITUATION

IN 1953, FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER THE AMERICAN COMIC BOOK MAKES ITS DEBUT, WE HAVE, WITH THE APEX OF E.C. COMICS (AND MAD SPECIFICALLY) THE FIRST INKLINGS THAT COMICS MAY HAVE SOME SORT OF POTENTIAL BEYOND LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR KID'S STUFF. FIFTEEN YEARS BEYOND THAT, WE HAVE THE UNDERGROUND "COMIX" MOVEMENT AND ANOTHER FIFTEEN YEARS LATER WE HAVE THE START OF THE UNNAMED "ADULT COMICS" MOVEMENT SPEARHEADED BY RAW, LOVE & ROCKETS AND WEIRDO. APPARENTLY FIFTEEN YEARS IS THE TIME IT TAKES FOR ONE GENERATION TO ABSORB THE DISCOVERIES AND FAILINGS OF THE PREVIOUS GENERATION AND TO GROW UP AND PRODUCE THEIR OWN COMICS. THE NEXT CREATIVE EPOCH IS DUE TO BEGIN IN 1998; ARE WE ON THE BRINK OF RAPTURE OR ARMAGEDDON?

AT THIS MOMENT THERE ARE (I'M GUESSING) CERTAINLY NO LESS THAN 3000 PEOPLE IN AMERICA WHO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS CARTOONISTS. OF THESE, THERE ARE BY MY ESTIMATION 20-25 CREATORS PRODUCING WORK OF AN EXTRAORDINARILY HIGH ORDER, AND ANOTHER 25 OR 30 WITH NOBLE ASPIRATIONS BUT SLIGHTLY LESS IMPRESSIVE RESULTS. THESE 50 ARTISTS HAVE EMERGED GRADUALLY FROM THE 1983 CROWD, WHICH MAKES THIS THE MOST ARTISTICALLY SUCCESSFUL FIFTEEN YEAR PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF COMICS, IN PART I SUSPECT BECAUSE IT BEGAN AND CONTINUES TO EXIST IN OBSCURITY, FREE FROM THE FEAR OF STATE OR CORPORATE CENSORSHIP AND REMOVED FROM ANY CULTURAL MOVEMENTS (IT'S NAMELESSNESS IS A UNDENIABLE ASSET). THEREFORE, THE YOUNG ARTIST OF 1998 HAS A PROBLEM: HOW TO ASSERT HIS OR HER OWN VOICE IN A FIELD WHERE SO MANY UNIQUE VOICES EXIST ALREADY. WILL THIS LEAD TO A LULL OR AN EVER-EXPANDING CONTINUUM?

AND WHERE DO THE REMAINING 2950 CARTOONISTS FIT IN TO ALL OF THIS? THE COMIC BOOK FIELD (I DIRECT THIS DISCUSSION TO COMIC BOOKS RATHER THAN DAILY STRIPS BECAUSE THE WORLD OF SYNDICATED STRIPS (WITH 2 OR 3 (AT MOST) EXCEPTIONS) IS A HOMELY WASTE-HEAD THAT SERVES ONLY AS A SCARE-CROW TO THE ELUSIVE MAINSTREAM AUDIENCE ("I GUESS COMICS REALLY ARE FOR IDIOTS")) AT LARGE IS PEOPLED BY TEENAGE

MILLIONAIRES WHO DRAW TO CREATE FODDER FOR "DEVELOPMENT DEALS" AND THOSE IN WAITING TO BE SAME. THE CREATIONS OF THESE AND ESPECIALLY THEIR LOW-END IMITATORS ARE NOT DEVOID OF CONTENT. MANY OF THEM OFFER AN EMBARRASSINGLY DIRECT LOOK INTO THE ID OF THEIR ADULESCENT CREATOR (THE MIS-CULATURE OF THE AVERAGE SUPER-BEING IS A LABYRINTH OF CASTRATION ANXIETY AND GENDER CONFUSION). FAR LESS INTERESTING ARE THOSE WHO ROAM THE UNTHRILLING NO-MAN'S-LAND BETWEEN "MAINSTREAM" AND "ALTERNATIVE". THESE MEN ARE OFTEN SKILLED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE ON A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS, BUT THEIR WORK SEEMS DILUTED AND IMPERSONAL, BUILT FROM SECONDARY SOURCES AND LACKING IN, EVEN FEARFUL OF, SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-DOUBT. (THE PUSSIES!)

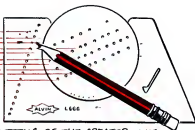
ON AN ENTIRELY SEPARATE TANGENT WE HAVE THE POLITICAL CARTOONISTS (WHY DO THEY ALL DRAW IN THAT ANNOYING STYLE?) AND AN EVER-DWINDLING NUMBER OF GAG CARTOONISTS AND CARTOON ILLUSTRATORS (THE NEW YORKER CROWD). THE LONG-TIME PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF THESE GROUPS LEADS ME TO BELIEVE THAT IT'S NOT THE COMICS FORM ITSELF THAT REPELS THINKING READERS, BUT THE RELENTLESSLY DULL AND INSIPID CONTENT OF THE COMICS THEY COME INTO CONTACT WITH (USUALLY THE OVERSTUFFED WORKS OF THE COMPROMISED MIDDLE-GROUNDER). THE "THINKING PUBLIC", THAT SLIPPERY, POTENTIAL AUDIENCE OF 200,000 OR SO THAT WE "KNOW" TO EXIST ARE, LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, ACCUSTOMED TO BEING BOMBARDED BY P.R. AND PULL QUOTES. THE COMICS FIELD HAS NO SUCH MACHINERY AND SO WHEN THE INTERESTED NEOPHYTE DECIDES TO GIVE COMICS A TRY, CHANCES ARE VERY HIGH THAT HE OR SHE WILL PICK UP SOMETHING BAD (OR SIMPLY ALIENATING) AT

RANDOM AND NEVER TRY AGAIN.



SO, WHY COMICS?

TO THOSE OF US WHO ARE "IN THE KNOW", COMICS HAVE AN INHERENT ENERGY TO THEM, ENTIRELY DIVORCED FROM CONTENT; A NEAR-ELECTRIC CHARGE THAT WE WOULD BE HARD-PRESSED TO DEFINE. THIS BUILT-IN AESTHETIC, WHAT WE MIGHT CALL THE "FETISH-VALUE" OF THE COMIC, MANIFESTS ITSELF BOTH IN TERMS OF THE CREATOR, WHO OFTEN WILL OBSESS OVER EVERY BALLOON POINTER AND PANEL LINE IN HIS UNWINNABLE STRUGGLE TO CREATE THE PERFECT OBJECT, AND THE READER (OR AS HE IS OFTEN KNOWN, "THE COLLECTOR") WHO COVETS THE ARTIST'S CREATION UNTIL HE HAS SAFELY SECURED OWNERSHIP.



THIS LEADS US TO ONE OF THE REASONS WHY COMICS ARE SUCH A POTENTIALLY ALLURING FORUM FOR THE INDIVIDUAL CREATOR: THEY ARE IN A SENSE THE ULTIMATE DOMAIN OF THE ARTIST WHO SEEKS TO WIELD ABSOLUTE CONTROL OVER HIS IMAGERY. NOVELS ARE THE WORK OF ONE INDIVIDUAL BUT THEY REQUIRE VISUAL COLLABORATION ON THE PART OF THE READER. FILM IS BY ITS NATURE A COLLABORATIVE ENDEAVOR. THE FILMMAKER'S VISION, FILTERED THROUGH "REALITY", IS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO A GENERAL AUDIENCE BUT IN MOST CASES LESS A PRECISE, PRE-CONCEIVED VISION THAN ONE BASED ON COMPROMISE AND SERENDIPITY. COMICS OFFER THE CREATOR A CHANCE TO CONTROL THE SPECIFICS OF HIS OWN WORLD IN BOTH ABSTRACT AND LITERAL TERMS. AS SUCH, THE BEST COMICS ARE USUALLY DONE BY A SINGLE CREATOR, OFTEN AN OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE TYPE WHO SPENDS HOURS FIXING THINGS AND MAKING TINY BACKGROUND DETAILS "JUST RIGHT". NABOKOV (WHOSE FAVORITE ARTIST WAS SAUL STEINBERG) HAS A GOOD LINE: "THERE IS NOTHING I LOATHE MORE THAN GROUP ACTIVITY, THAT COMMUNAL BATH WHERE THE HAIRY AND SLIPPERY MIX IN A MULTIPLICATION OF MEDIOCRITY." AT ITS HIGHEST LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT, COMICS ALLOWS THE CREATOR TO TRANSMIT VIVID IMAGES FROM ONE SPECIFIC IMAGINATION TO ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL WHO MAY REACT AS PASSIVELY OR ACTIVELY AS HE SEES FIT, WITHOUT AN EDITOR OR A PANEL OF EXECUTIVES TWEAKING IT TO MAKE IT MORE "AUDIENCE-FRIENDLY".


THERE IS SOMETHING, HOWEVER, BEYOND THE THRILL OF TRANSMITTING THOUGHT TO POSTERITY THAT DRAWS THE CARTOONIST TO HIS MEDIUM AND THAT IS THE CREATION OF THE COMIC BOOK ITSELF AS A PERSONAL FETISH-OBJECT. FREUD, NABOKOV'S FOE, IDENTIFIES THE FETISH AS A STAND-IN FOR THE MOTHER'S MISSING PENIS. THE APPEAL OF COMICS TO COLLECTORS (MYLAR, PRICE GUIDES, ETC.) AFFIRMS THEIR FETISH-VALUE. THE INTENSITY OF THEIR FIXATION IS ONLY HEIGHTENED BY THE ASSOCIATIONS COMICS HAVE TO CHILDHOOD. EVEN IN THIS VIDEO-

CONTINUED ON PAGE TEN



SATURATED WORLD, THE AVERAGE CHILD IN HIS OR HER FORMATIVE YEARS HAS HIS EARLIEST "ARTISTIC EXPERIENCES" WITH CARTOON DRAWINGS (IF NOT COMICS, THEN CERTAINLY ANIMATION AND CHILDREN'S BOOKS). THIS GIVES US AS CARTOONISTS A GREAT TOOL AT OUR DISPOSAL IN THAT BY THE NATURE OF OUR MEDIUM ALONE WE CAN CONNECT A READER TO FEELINGS ENGENDERED BY HIS EARLIEST AND PUREST ARTISTIC EXPERIENCES.

EVEN (ESPECIALLY) IN THEIR MOST DEBASED FORM, COMICS HAVE AN AURA TO THEM OF UNSPOKEN TRUTH. IMAGINE, FOR EXAMPLE, A CHILD BORN INTO A HELLISH MARRIAGE, THE DETAILS OF WHICH ARE SO HORRIFIC THAT THEY ARE NEVER DISCUSSED. HIS PARENTS SOON DIVORCE AND AN OLDER BROTHER, THE ONLY WITNESS TO THE HORROR-YEARS, IS TOO TRAUMATIZED TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE YOUNGER CHILD. THE ONLY TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION COMES INDIRECTLY FROM THE OLDER BROTHER'S STACK OF COMICS, REMNANTS OF THE HELLISH MARRIAGE YEARS, THAT EXPRESS, THROUGH HIS SELECTION IN BUYING THESE PARTICULAR COMICS, THE NATURE OF THE TRAUMA IN MYTHIC / SYMBOLIC TERMS (HAGS, MAD SCIENTISTS AND INVULNERABLE SUPER-TOTS), IN A HOUSE THAT HAS REPPRESSED EMOTIONAL HORROR TO A LIFELESS APPROXIMATION OF "NORMALCY" THESE COMICS ARE A RECORD OF UNSPOKEN AND UNSPEAKABLE TRUTH. IF THE YOUNG BOY SHOULD ONE DAY CREATE HIS OWN WORKS OF ART WE COULD EXPECT HIM TO IN SOME WAY ADDRESS THIS HIDDEN LANGUAGE AND TO INTERPRET HIS NOTIONS OF THE TRUTH BASED ON THIS EXPERIENCE.

IF WE ENLARGE THIS AND APPLY IT TO SOCIETY AS A WHOLE WE SEE THE INHERENT VALUE OF WORKING IN A FIELD THAT IS BENEATH CONSIDERATION. WHILE WE ARE CERTAINLY HELD AT BAY BY THE PRECONCEPTIONS OF THE GENERAL AUDIENCE, WE ALSO STAND TO GAIN IN WAYS THAT WE ARE OFTEN UNWILLING TO EXPLOIT. THIS AURA OF TRUTHFULNESS THAT WE SPEAK OF COMES AS A BY-PRODUCT OF BEING THOUGHT OF AS UNSOPHISTICATED AND (CULTURALLY, FINANCIALLY) INSIGNIFICANT. THE SOPHISTICATED AND SIGNIFICANT CARTOONIST CAN FOR THE TIME BEING TWIST THIS TO HIS OR HER ADVANTAGE, "HAVING IT BOTH WAYS", WITH THE AWARENESS THAT IF HE MANAGES TO ACHIEVE ANY DEGREE OF ACCEPTANCE ALONGSIDE THE MORE RESPECTABLE SORT OF CREATOR, THIS NOT INSUBSTANTIAL QUALITY WILL BE LOST FOREVER. 



TO THE YOUNG CARTOONIST

THE SHEER AMOUNT OF CRAFT FOR WHICH THE CARTOONIST IS RESPONSIBLE (FROM DRAWING TO ACTING TO TYPOGRAPHY, ETC., ETC., ETC.) TAKES YEARS FOR EVEN THE MOST GIFTED PRODIGY TO ASSIMILATE; A PROCESS MADE ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT BY THE WOEFUL LACK OF SATISFYING EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW. FRUSTRATED AND BEWILDERED, THE CARTOONIST MUST STUDY ALL SORTS OF DISPARATE MEDIA AND LEARN SLOWLY AND TENTATIVELY BY TRIAL AND ERROR. IDEALLY, THEREFORE, THE CARTOONIST (LIKE THE NOVELIST, THE PAINTER, ETC.) SHOULD DO HIS BEST WORK IN HIS FORTIES OR FIFTIES, AFTER HE'S HAD A CHANCE TO DEVELOP SOME CONFIDENCE, BUT ONLY A FEW DETERMINED SOULS ARE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THEIR ENTHUSIASM FOR THAT LONG WITHOUT GIVING IN TO EASY FORMULAS, SHORTCUTS, ETC.

TO SPARE HIM/HERSELF A LIFE OF FRUSTRATION, THE YOUNG CARTOONIST SHOULD FIGURE OUT WITH RUTHLESS OBJECTIVITY WHY HE HAS CHOSEN THIS FIELD. WOULD HE RATHER BE A NOVELIST BUT FEELS THAT THE DEBASED FORM OF COMICS OFFERS LESS COMPETITION SO HE DEVELOPS A RUDIMENTARY STYLE TO ILLUSTRATE STORIES THAT WOULD GO UNNOTICED IN ANY OTHER MEDIUM? WOULD SHE RATHER BE A PAINTER BUT FEELS SHE'D BE MORE SUCCESSFUL APPLYING HER SHOPWORN IDEAS TO A FIELD WHERE THE READERS LACK ANY AWARENESS OF ARTISTIC TRENDS? IF SO, HE AND SHE SHOULD GET MARRIED AND LEAVE US ALONE. EVEN THE COMMITTED CARTOONIST SHOULD CONTINUALLY QUESTION THE WAY HE DOES THINGS. DOES HE, FOR EXAMPLE, DRAW IN A "LOOSE" STYLE BECAUSE HE THINKS IT HAS "ENERGY" OR BECAUSE IT'S FASTER AND TAKES LESS EFFORT AND, TO BE HONEST, HE CAN'T DRAW? DON'T BE AFRAID TO LOOK AT YOUR WORK, GET DISGUSTED, THROW IT ALL IN THE TOILET, AND START ANEW.

SOME IDEAS TO CONSIDER:

COMICS TEND TO LEAN TOWARD THE ICONIC ("THE ADVENTURES OF A FEATURELESS BLOB") BECAUSE IT ENCOURAGES READER IDENTIFICATION. LET'S GET AWAY FROM THIS ARENA OF VAGUENESS (A CHEAP GIMMICK DESIGNED TO FLATTER THE SHALLOW READER)

AND INTO THE REALM OF THE SPECIFIC .

STUDY AND CONTEMPLATE THE NATURE OF PICTORIAL STILLNESS . WHAT DOES THE STILL PICTURE HAVE TO OFFER A NARRATIVE THAT THE MOVING ONE DOESN'T . FIND AND STUDY AN INTRIGUING MOVIE STILL FROM A FILM YOU'VE NEVER SEEN , THEN WATCH THE MOVIE TO SEE HOW AND WHY IT FALLS APART AND LOSES ITS COMPELLING MYSTIQUE .

THINK OF THE COMIC PANEL (OR PAGE OR STORY) AS A LIVING MECHANISM WITH , FOR EXAMPLE , THE TEXT REPRESENTING THE BRAIN (THE INTERNAL ; IDEAS , REUGION) AND THE PICTURES REPRESENTING THE BODY (THE EXTERNAL ; BIOLOGY , ETC.) , BROUGHT TO LIFE BY THE ALMOST TANGIBLE SPARK CREATED BY THE PERFECT JUXTAPOSITION OF PANELS IN SEQUENCE .

CONSIDER USING ALL OF THE "HOKEY" DEVICES AVAILABLE IN THE COMICS VOCABULARY (THOUGHT BALLOONS , SOUND EFFECTS , ETC.) . THEY ARE NO LESS INHERENTLY NEUTRAL THAN A COMMA OR A WHISPER OR A LAP DISSOLVE AND IT IS ONLY THEIR DEBASED USAGE THAT HAS MADE THEM SO .

THE COMIC BOOK REALLY IS A PERFECT CONSUMER ITEM . IT'S PORTABLE , FLEXIBLE , CHEAP ENOUGH TO BE DISPOSABLE , DURABLE ENOUGH TO LAST SEVERAL LIFETIMES WITH PROPER ARCHIVAL CARE , LIGHTWEIGHT , COLORFUL AND SIMPLE (NO PACKAGING OR SHRINK-WRAP REQUIRED) . THINK IN TERMS OF THE ENTIRE PACKAGE , THE STRUCTURAL COHESION OF EVERY COMPONENT (FROM PAGE NUMBERS TO INDICIA , ETC.)





THE FUTURE AND BEYOND

AS WE ENTER, VOICELESS AND IMPOTENT, A DIGITAL AGE OF "INSTANT ACCESS" (OR CONSTANT EXCESS), THE FRAGILE CHEMISTRY OF THIS, OUR HAND-HELD, NON-AUTOMATIC PICTORIAL NARRATIVE DEVICE AND ITS INHERENTLY SUBLIME NUANCES (THE TEXTURE AND SILENCE OF THE PAGES AND OUR PROFOUND TRUST IN PROCESSED WOOD-PULP TO CONVEY THESE CHARMS WITHOUT THREAT OF MECHANICAL FAILURE OR ANNOYING CHIRPING SOUNDS) APPEARS TO BE IN GRAVE DANGER. READING A COMIC BOOK AS GOD INTENDED IS A SIMPLE PLEASURE AND AS SUCH, OUR PRECIOUS PICTORIAL PAMPHLET, LIKE VAUDEVILLE AND THE MAGIC LANTERN, IS JUST THE SORT OF THING THAT GETS CRUSHED IN THE GEARS OF PROGRESS.

THERE WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO EXIST PICTURE/WORD NARRATIVES IN SOME TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED FORM, BUT ONCE THESE STILL, NOISELESS MOMENTS ARE TRANSFERRED TO A WORLD OF OVERWHELMING POSSIBILITIES (CAN'T YOU JUST HEAR THE IRRITATING SOUND EFFECTS) THEY BECOME UNDERACHIEVING ALIENS TO THEIR CONTEXT, CONDESCENDED TO BY THEIR VERY MODE OF TRANSMISSION. WHO WILL WANT TO LOOK AT SUCH A SAD SPECTACLE, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE TURNING OF A KNOB BRINGS US THE 3-D STEREO ALL-NECROPHILIA CHANNEL? IT'S LIKE WALKING PAST A SAD MOM & POP GROCERY STORE NEXT TO A GIANT SUPERMARKET; YOU WANT TO SUPPORT IT BUT SOMEHOW IT SEEMS ALMOST CRUEL TO PROLONG ITS MISERY.

THE NEW TECHNOLOGY PROMISES A STRUCTURAL SHIFT ("DEMOCRATIZATION" IS A WORD THEY USE) IN THE READER'S FAVOR, GIVING HIM AN EXAGGERATED ROLE IN THE GIVE-AND-TAKE BETWEEN ARTIST AND AUDIENCE. HE IS TO BE GIVEN CHOICES SO HE CAN "INTERACT" WITH THE NARRATIVE. IS THIS A GOOD THING? IS OUR EVERY-READER A WORTHY COLLABORATOR OR DOES HIS INVOLVEMENT DILUTE THE WHOLE PROCESS? DO WE, AS READERS, WANT THIS? THIS IS WHERE THE "ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA" AT LARGE IS HEADED: TO PANDER TO THE IMPATIENT LOU AND TO PROVIDE HIM WITH MATERIAL THAT RANGES ONLY FROM MASTURBATION FODDER TO THE NARRATIVE EQUIVA-

OF A ROLLER-COASTER RIDE .

IT'S PRECISELY BECAUSE OF THIS ALL-AROUND CULTURAL DECLINE THAT I SEE HOPE FOR THE "COMICS INDUSTRY" TO CONTINUE IN SOMETHING RESEMBLING ITS PRESENT INCARNATION FOR THE "FORESEEABLE FUTURE", PERHAPS EVEN TO "BREAK OUT" SOMEWHAT AND REACH A LARGER AUDIENCE (ONE THAT HAS THE IMPULSE TO READ BUT HAS LOST THE TASTE FOR WORDS WITHOUT ACCOMPANYING PICTURES). BEYOND THAT COMICS WILL CONTINUE TO EXIST AS LONG AS THEY ARE MADE. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE, AT WORST, A SMALL BUT INTERESTED ELITE. PERHAPS ONCE COMICS ARE SOUNDLY BEATEN TO DEATH IN THE MARKETPLACE THEY'LL BEGIN TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY ACADEMICS, ART HISTORIANS AND THE LIKE, BUT THIS CAN'T HAPPEN UNLESS DEDICATED CARTOONISTS CONTINUE TO PRODUCE COMICS OF SUCH INCREASINGLY HIGH QUALITY THAT THEY ARE EVENTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO DISMISS AND IGNORE. I SUSPECT THAT EVEN IN THE FACE OF UTTER INDIFFERENCE THERE ARE THOSE OF US WHO WILL CONTINUE TO CREATE COMICS, IF ONLY BECAUSE OF THE VAST UNEXPLORED PRAIRIE BETWEEN WHAT HAS BEEN DONE AND THE THRILLING POSSIBILITIES THAT LIE AROUND US IN ALL DIRECTIONS.



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7563 LAKE CITY WAY NE, SEATTLE, WA.
98115 USA FOR ONE DOLLAR APIECE

BLACK NYLON



YOU CAN'T BUY WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR. THANK GOD, OR I'D BE OUT OF BUSINESS. YOU CAN ONLY WAIT AND HOPE YOU'RE PAYING ATTENTION WHEN IT COMES. THE PRECIOUS FRAGMENT (AS OBVIOUS AS A BLOODY SOCK OR AS SUBTLE AS A MISSING EYELASH) THAT, WHEN RECONFIGURED IN SEQUENCE WITH GUD-SEQUENT 'CLUES', YIELDS AN ASSEMBLAGE OF APPROXIMATE TRUTH.



THIS INITIAL FRAGMENT SHOULD BE COMPELLING AND UNFATHOMABLE, WITH A TRACE OF HAUNTING FAMILIARITY—JUST ENOUGH TO GET YOU GOING...



...SO THE OLD MAN IS DEAD AND THE SON IS MISSING. SUSPICIOUS? THE MOM IS GOING NUTS LOOKING FOR HIM...

ALONG THE WAY THERE'S GOUND TO BE TROUBLE, ACTION, ETC. IT'S ALL KIND OF TIRESOME, REALLY... I ONCE BROUGHT THIS UP WITH MY SHRINK AND SHE SUGGESTED THAT I TURN THE PROCESS INWARD. THAT BY USING EXTERNAL 'CLUES' LINKED IN PURELY SUBCONSCIOUS WAYS I MIGHT FIND A PATH TO A MORE REWARDING INNER TRUTH...



ATTABOY, TIGER!

LOOK AT HIM DAD... HE'S A SISSY!

I DIDN'T QUITE GET IT, AND ANYWAY I HAD TO STOP SEEING HER BECAUSE I WAS GETTING TOO ATTACHED, AND FRANKLY THERE WERE CERTAIN THINGS I COULDN'T STAND FOR HER TO FIGURE OUT...

I'M A VIOLENT PERSON BY NATURE, BUT I DON'T LET IT PREOCCUPY ME. I GET REVENGE WHENEVER POSSIBLE AND THE REST OF THE TIME I LET IT GO.



ANOTHER DISTRACTION FOR ME IS MONEY... I'VE GOT A PROBLEM - I OBESESS OVER MONEY. IMPROPER TOILET TRAINING, SAYS THE SHRINK... ANYWAY, I'M WORKING ON IT.



STILL, I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED TO GET MY CHECK. I WASN'T EVEN SURE I WAS STILL ON THE PAYROLL. IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I "ACTED IN THE PUBLIC GOOD".



I DECIDED I'D BETTER DEPOSIT THE CHECK IMMEDIATELY, WHICH MEANT GETTING SHIT UP. (I'M IN FULL COSTUME ON MY BANK I-D.)



IT'S OKAY, I'M THINKING. BECAUSE IT WILL GIVE ME A CHANCE TO WEAR MY NEW BELT IN PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME... NOT THAT ANYONE WILL NOTICE...



AFTER A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TIME THEY TAKE YOU FOR GRANTED, NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO.



WHAT DO THEY EXPECT WHEN SOMEONE IS BORN INTO A SITUATION LIKE THAT?



YOU CAN'T GET TOO INVOLVED WITH THE PUBLIC: THEY'LL BREAK YOUR HEART EVERY TIME... IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MUCH YOU THINK THEY LOVE YOU...

I THINK HE WANTED HER ALL TO HIMSELF!

RIGHT NOW THEY'VE GOT A THING FOR THIS KID CALLED HERO BOY OR BOYHERO OR SOMETHING... SIXTEEN OR SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD... EVERYBODY'S FALLING ALL OVER THEMSELVES TRYING TO GET TO HERO BOY... I'VE GOT NO PROBLEM WITH THAT.



I'M OUT OF SYNC WITH THE PUBLIC. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHY AREN'T YOU HELPING US SUBDUSE THE MAD BOMBER?" OR WHATEVER. MY SHRINK ONCE TOLD ME I WAS "WORSE THAN A NARCISSIST."



SHE SAID I WAS LIVING IN A SELF-CREATED WORLD; THAT THE WORLD ISN'T THE WAY I THINK IT IS AT ALL. I TOLD HER: "REALITY IS A MEANINGLESS CONSENSUS. I'M TRYING TO GET AT THIS INNER REALITY YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT."



I KEPT THINKING ABOUT THAT POOR KID WHO STRANGLED HIS FATHER. THAT'S WHAT I DECIDED TO FOCUS ON. WAS EVERYBODY TALKING ABOUT IT OR WAS IT JUST MY IMAGINATION? MAYBE I WAS MORE IN SYNC THAN I THOUGHT.



MY SHRINK HAD POLITELY REQUESTED THAT I STOP SEEING HER BUT I FELT I NEEDED TO CLEAR A FEW THINGS UP BEFORE I MOVED ON. I FELT LIKE MAYBE SHE COULD POINT ME IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION ON THIS THING.



IN AN EARLY SESSION I TOLD HER ABOUT MY FIRST COSTUME, MADE FROM ONE OF MY MOTHER'S STOCKINGS. SHE MADE A BIG DEAL OUT OF IT SO I KEPT QUIET ABOUT A LOT OF OTHER STUFF... NOW I WAS READY TO COME CLEAN.



IT WAS AN AWFUL FEELING, SEEING HER THERE AGAIN. FEAR PLUS REVULSION, TRIGGERED BY THAT WEIRD PSYCHIATRIC SMELL...

LOOK, CALL ME SOME OTHER TIME AND MAYBE WE CAN TALK...



IT WAS HIM. THAT BOY HERO CHARACTER, LIVING IT UP.

NICE BELT, CAPN! VERY CREATIVE WAY TO KEEP THE GUT IN CHECK!



SMART KID. HE KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING WITH HIS LITTLE WISDCRACK. NOW I WAS FULLY DISTRACTED.



I NEEDED MORE, SO I ELBOWED MY WAY INSIDE.

TOO BAD FOR HIM I STILL HAD A FEW TRICKS OF MY OWN, LIKE THE ABILITY TO ISOLATE AND EXPLOIT A Foe's WEAKNESSES WITH RUTHLESS EFFICIENCY.

THIS BOY'S WEAKNESS WAS PUSSEY, AND I KNEW JUST THE GIRL TO HELP ME IN HASTENING HIS INEVITABLE FALL. A WOMAN I DID A JOB FOR A FEW YEARS BACK...

IF YOU CAN MAKE THAT BUM PAY HIS CHILD SUPPORT, I'LL DO ANYTHING...



HE TURNED OUT TO BE A REAL NUTCASE, BEETING WITH DESPERATION BUT VERY ATTRACTIVE... WHAT WE CALL A "CAPE CHARGER"... HERD BOY WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE IF SHE GOT HER HOOKS INTO HIM...



I STOOD THERE AT HER DOOR NOT KNOWING EXACTLY WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY ("HI, REMEMBER ME? I'D LIKE TO SET YOU UP WITH MY ARCH-ENEMY!") WHEN IT DAWNED ON ME THAT I NEVER DID FINISH THAT JOB... I'M NOT SURE I EVER EVEN TALKED TO HER AGAIN AFTER THAT ONE TIME...



I REALLY NEED TO TALK TO YOU...



I THOUGHT ABOUT USING A STUN-GAS GRENADE BUT SHE DIDN'T SEEM INTENT ON PURSUING ME, SO I HELD OFF IN FAVOR OF A SIMPLE RUNNING ESCAPE...

I DECIDED TO FORGET ABOUT BOYHERD AND GET BACK TO THE CASE AT HAND (WHICH, AS YOU CAN SEE, IS GOING NOWHERE). I'M REACHING FOR THE PHONE TO CHECK MY MESSAGES WHEN I HEAR THREE LOUD BANGS...



THE WAY SHE PROBABLY SAW IT, I HAD "TAKEN ADVANTAGE" OF HER...



WHAT COULD YOU POSSIBLY WANT?

I NEEDED TO GET OUT OF THERE FAST...



ARE YOU READY TO BE A FATHER TO YOUR SON? HE NEEDS YOU! ALL THESE CHILDREN NEED A FATHER!



I HOPE YOU CATCH AIDS!

THIS IS NO MISTAKE, I'M THINKING... WHOEVER DID THIS KNEW EXACTLY WHAT THEY WERE DOING... IN THIS BUSINESS YOUR RIGHT FIST IS YOUR BEST FRIEND.



LUCKILY, I KNEW A DOCTOR IN THE AREA WHO OWE ME A FAVOR...

THIS ONE I REALLY DID HELP... SAVED HIS KID OR SOMETHING... I THOUGHT THE OLD WOP WAS GOING TO KISS ME...



HE WASN'T SO FRIENDLY THIS TIME. I HAD TO WAIT FOREVER WHILE HE FINISHED ARGUING WITH SOMEBODY IN THE BACK ROOM...



IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT THE CURRENT CHAIN OF EVENTS HAD LED ME THERE TO DISCOVER THE NEXT CLUE, BUT NOTHING WAS JUMPING OUT AT ME...



OUT OF DESPERATION I GRABBED A FILE FOLDER ON THE WAY OUT. AT THE TIME I DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE THE NAME ON THE LABEL. COINCIDENCE IS USUALLY A GOOD SIGN THAT YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK.



I DIDN'T LOOK THROUGH THE FILE UNTIL I GOT HOME. YOU NEED TO BE IN THE RIGHT MOOD FOR THAT KIND OF THING...



IT WAS HOLLYWOOD CALLING...



IN THE FOLDER WERE ABOUT A DOZEN AUTOGRAPH PHOTOS (A FORTY YEAR OLD WHITE MALE) AND A SINGLE, BLURRED PHOTO OF A CAVE...



THIS WAS THE STORY SO FAR: A BOY STRANGLES HIS FATHER AND FLEES A Vengeful MOTHER, WHILE A DOCTOR HAS IN HIS FILE OF AUTOPSY PHOTOS A SMILE PICTURE OF A CAVE. WHAT MADE THESE THINGS SO INTERESTING? WHO KNOWS? IT'S AN UNCONSCIOUS THING: THE REACTION IS PURELY PHYSICAL (IN SOME PEOPLE A SHIVER OR GOOSEBUMPS, IN MY CASE A TINGLING THAT RUSHES FROM FOREHEAD TO PERINEUM.)



AS EVIDENCE OF THE CLARITY OF MY INTUITION, THERE SHE WAS JUST AS I PICTURED HER, THAT HORRIBLE HAG...



IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE MOTHER-HAG TO THE CAVE WAS ONE OF OBJECT TO SYMBOL- BUT WHAT COMES AFTER A SYMBOL? PURE ESSENCE? IF SO, I HAD REALLY BLOWN IT...



THE TWO CLUES WERE RELATED IN SOME ELUSIVE WAY. IF I COULD FIGURE OUT THIS CONNECTION I COULD FIND A WAY TO THE NEXT CLUE AND THEN I'D BE ON TO SOMETHING...



FIRST I PUT THE BOY OUT OF HIS MISERY AND THEN I DEALT WITH THE HAG. I JUST WASN'T READY TO CONFRONT A SCENE LIKE THAT SO I GOT VIOLENT...



IT'S ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THE CAVE WAS A FALSE LEAD. MAYBE THE MAN IN THE AUTOPSY PHOTOS (HE HAD A STOCKING AROUND HIS NECK) HAD REMINDED ME OF THE SLAIN FATHER AND THAT'S WHY I HAD CONNECTED THE TWO CLUES... NOT THAT IT MATTERS AT THIS POINT...



I HAD COME UNPREPARED. THIS WAS WHERE I COULD HAVE REALLY USED SOME EXTRA HELP FROM MY SHRINK. AS IT WAS I HAD PAINTED MYSELF INTO A CORNER AND TAKEN THE EASY WAY OUT... I DECIDED RIGHT THEN TO DEVOTE ALL MY ENERGY TO MY CAREER AND TO IMPRESSING THOSE PRODUCERS IN THE MORNING... THIS THOUGHT WAS INTERRUPTED BY TWO MORE LOUD BANGS...





AND THAT WAS IT. THE KID FLEW BACK TO THE CITY WITH HIS JET PACK THING (THE ONLY PART OF HIS GUTTICK HE DIDN'T LIFT FROM ME) WHILE I PASSED OUT AND MISSED MY BIG MEETING...



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